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SUBJECT: "TWO TERMS THREATENS DEMOCRACY AND PEACE" SAYS  
NIGERIA'S AMBASSADOR TO THE U.S.

¶11. Summary: On November 16, Nigerian Ambassador to the U.S., Professor Jibril Aminu, said in a press interview that the idea of two terms for officials is a threat to Nigeria's democracy and peace in the country. Aminu, who spoke on a wide range of issues, reiterated that the North had with all Presidential candidates before the 1999 elections to protect their interests. Aminu was optimistic that the Bakassi issue would be settled with Cameroon. He spoke positively about U.S.-Nigerian relations, and acknowledged that improved government management could strengthen Niger's image. End Summary.

Nigeria's Ambassador to the U.S. Speaks to the Press

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¶12. On November 16, Nigerian Ambassador to the U.S., Professor Jibril Aminu gave a three-page interview to the New Nigerian Weekly, a Kaduna-based, government-owned newspaper. Aminu confirmed that all the Presidential candidates in 1999 signed an agreement to support the North's interests. He denied that President Obasanjo had agreed to a single term in the context of the discussion. He warned that the two-term issue is a threat to democracy in Nigeria, and advocated a single five-year term for the President, State governors, and Chairmen of the Local Government Councils.

¶13. Ambassador Aminu said that Nigerian politicians are dishonestly using ethnicity because "they are not doing anything for their people." He made generous references to the United States political system saying: "In the United States you hardly catch a Congressman on Friday in the evening for any. They have gone home. They spend Saturday and a large part of Sunday working with their own people, visiting, and answering questions, answering telephone calls and e-mails, and then they come back to Washington. Our people don't do that."

¶14. Answering a question on how people outside Nigeria, especially the United States, view Nigeria, Ambassador Aminu said, "You may not believe it but Nigeria is held in a very high esteem, particularly in the United States. There were problems with the military governments before General Abduls Abubakar restored the country to democracy. He said the people of Nigeria have always been recognized and applauded for their skills adding, "Tens of thousands of Nigerians are living and working in the United States at the highest contributing a lot to that society."

¶15. Commenting on the International Court of Justice verdict on the Bakassi dispute between Nigeria and the Cameroon, Ambassador Aminu said, "I do not want us to just reject and sit down. I do not want us to reject, and then move into conflict with Cameroon, an African state, our sister African state neighbor with whom we shared so many useful experiences in the past including much of it being part of Nigeria before. But, I don't think we should fight them."

¶16. Asked about the possibility of violence in the 2003 elections, Ambassador Aminu said, "This is something entirely in our hands. And I believe, if we decide to behave ourselves, to reflect on the dangers, and to reflect on our promises, the opportunities that lie ahead of this country in a successful election, we think we can still do it. Professor Aminu, however, expressed disappointment with the political fighting in the country remarking, "You know, there is an impression that we lack some seriousness." He added that outsiders have an impression that Nigeria's political elites and intelligentsia are not fully committed. Mismanagement remains an issue for Nigerians to overcome. He stressed that Nigeria could do well with "the right people in the right places."

¶17. Footnote: According to recent press reports, Aminu has announced his intention to seek a Senate seat in Adamawa in the 2003 elections.

Jeter